

ABSTRACT

Disclosed herein is an improved process for producing ethyl acetate comprising contacting acetic acid and ethanol in a reaction zone in the presence of an acid catalyst, distilling formed vapors and condensing to form an organic phase rich in ethyl acetate and an aqueous phase rich in water, separating the phases and further distilling each phase to obtain a final purified ethyl acetate product and a water stream low in organic components, the improvement comprising directing the organic phase from the first distillation to the reaction zone. An alternate embodiment involves directing at least a portion of the organic phase from the first distillation to a membrane separation unit which removes water and/or alcohol from the organic phase rich in ethyl acetate

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